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SUBJECT: NIGER: MNJ REACTS TO TANDJA SPEECH

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¶1. In his April 23 address marking the anniversary of the 1995 agreement ending the rebellion of the early 1990s, President Tandja said, inter alia:

-- the GON is open to discussion with different parts of Nigerien society;

-- it continues to greet with open arms and to listen to those who agree to talks;

-- it invites those who continue to bear arms to lay down those arms, release their hostages, reintegrate peacefully, and join their brother and sisters in building the nation;

-- the country has no need for a fratricidal conflict, but of reflection and work;

-- Niger is a sovereign country which will defend its sovereignty and internal security;

-- There will not be any accommodation with those involved in trafficking; and,

-- it is legitimate to ask who is supporting those behind the attacks in the north.

¶2. Some optimistic observers highlighted as a possible softening of the GON position Tandja's reference to being open to discussion, as well as the fact that he did not refer to the MNJ as bandits, criminals or traffickers.

¶3. Even before Tandja's speech, GON officials had expressed a willingness to negotiate with the MNJ, but only if the group first disarmed.

¶4. An April 29 posting on the MNJ website signed by MNJ President Aghali Alambo dismissed Tandja's speech as no different from earlier ones, except for the omission of the word "bandits." Alambo said the MNJ had always preferred negotiation, but stressed that it would define the conditions for negotiations, to include: the lifting of the state of alert in the north; an independent investigation into the massacre of civilians; the liberation of people being arbitrarily detained; and the cessation of intimidation, kidnappings and other human rights violations committed by the security services. He said that disarmament could only be decided through negotiations.

¶5. The MNJ web site on May 4 reported fighting between MNJ and GON forces near Gougaram. It claimed to have killed five GON soldiers and seriously wounded another seven. It also claimed that the GON lost an ultralight surveillance aircraft.

ALLEN